

FIELD MANUAL

VETERANS TOWN HALL



OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN SETH MOULTON
VETERANS DAY

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WELCOME

"A Vets Town Hall gives veterans of all wars a chance to address their community directly. As a veteran speaking at a Vets Town Hall, you will look out over a crowd that has many familiar faces in it, as well as complete strangers. These are the people you risked your life for. These are the people you went to war for. No one goes to war and returns home unaffected. It's not fair—or healthy—for veterans to be left alone with these burdens. They belong to all of us.

These events are solemn and non-political. There is no question-and-answer period afterward. There will be no debate on the merits or justifications of war. There will be no recriminations or accusations. This is simply a chance for veterans to tell the community what it felt like to go to war. Some vets will be incredibly proud. Others will be angry. A few might cry too hard to even be able to speak. A community ceremony like this will return the experience of war to our entire nation rather than just leaving it to the people who fought."

-Sebastian Junger

ABOUT

The first Vets Town Hall was held on Veterans Day 2015. The idea, conceived by author Sebastian Junger, was simple but powerful: to provide a forum for veterans to share the pride, grief, or quiet appreciation of life that war bestowed upon them and for non-veterans to listen and to learn.

U.S. Representative Seth Moulton (D-MA), a Marine combat veteran, hosted the first Veterans Town Hall in Marblehead, Massachusetts — held in historic Abbott Hall, the community's town hall and gathering place for nearly 150 years. Several hundred local residents turned out to hear the unique stories of nearly two dozen veterans. These veterans represented every branch of the military and every military conflict dating back to World War II. The oldest storyteller, Bill Needleman, was a 100-year old Army Air Corps veteran who participated in the Normandy invasion on D-Day.

The vision is that one day there will be a Vets Town Hall held in every community in America every Veterans Day. Not only will these town halls will be as unique as the communities where they are held, but they will also be united in their commitment to help our nation heal and bring meaning back to Veterans Day.

"Being a part of our nation's first-ever Veterans Day Town Hall made for the single most meaningful day of my time so far in Congress."



ABBOTT HALL



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following items are not required; however, they are strong recommendations gained from our experience hosting our own Vets Town Hall. We believe the adoption of these recommendations would be beneficial, but we understand that flexibility is necessary and recognize that each individual event will be unique.

EVENT TIMING

The event should be held on Veterans Day

SPEAKING ROLES: GROUND RULES, OPENING, AND CLOSING REMARKS

There are only two speaking roles, aside from the veteran storytellers, and these are the only two roles appropriate for non-veteran participants: the Host and the MC.

The Host opens the event by introducing himself or herself, thanking everyone for attending, and reading the short Opening Remarks provided (Appendix, Item 1). At the conclusion of the event, the Host will read the Concluding Remarks (Appendix, Item 4). The host can be a veteran, elected official or prominent community member. It is important that the host understands his or her limited role and does not detract from the veteran storytellers.

The Master of Ceremonies (MC) will lead the remainder of the event.

The MC's role is to manage the flow of the veteran storytellers and to maintain an atmosphere of respect and civility throughout the program. Prior to introducing the first speaker, the MC will read the Ground Rules (Appendix, Item 2).

The provided ground rules must be read by the MC and must be used to begin the speaker portion of the event.

The event then moves directly to the speakers, ensuring the majority of time will be composed of veterans sharing their personal stories.

The provided closing remarks should be read by the host and must be used to end the event. The host may add his or

The MC's role is to manage the flow of the veteran storytellers and to maintain an atmosphere of respect and civility throughout the program.

her own remarks during the closing. No one else ought to speak after the closing remarks.

SPEAKERS

The event ought to be open to any veteran who wishes to speak. However, an initial group of speakers should be recruited prior to the event with a focus on diversity and veterans who will model good speaking practices for others to follow. The diversity of your speakers should include gender, branch of service, conflict era and rank, with a mix of both positive and negative experiences.

The predetermined speakers will be introduced in accordance with provided instructions, and if any time remains, the MC ought to open the floor to other veterans in the audience who would like to speak (Appendix, Item 5).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following items are not required; however, they are strong recommendations gained from our experience hosting our own Vets Town Hall. We believe the adoption of these recommendations would be beneficial, but we understand that flexibility is necessary and recognize that each individual event will be unique.

VENUE AND SET UP

The location in which the event is held should be a community meeting place that is ADA-compliant.

We strongly recommend holding your event in a local city or town hall, as these buildings are the center for civic life in this country.

A venue with a pre-existing sound system and podium is ideal. If this is not possible, arrange for a qualified sound engineer to set up and adjust the microphone and PA system in the main hall. Prior to the event, ensure the sound system is working properly and test it accordingly: test for feedback, connectability between microphones and speakers, etc.

Visually, a podium framed by one American and one State flag is all that should be displayed for the event. No signage for public, private, or government organizations should be used.

PRESS INVOLVEMENT

A sample press advisory is provided (Appendix, Item 3), and instructions for the requested conduct of the press are included in the ground rules (Appendix, Item 2).

OPERATIONS

We believe that a strict 10-minute time limit per speaker is the best approach for the structure of this event. This time limit ensures that many veterans will have the opportunity to speak, and the strict adherence ensures a fair and equitable use of time.

We recommend placing a timekeeper in plain sight of the speaker who will keep the speaker on time.

We recommend using three different cards: "5 Minutes Remaining", "1 Minute Remaining", "Time's Up" (Appendix, Item 6). If preferred, a smartphone app with a timer could be placed on the podium in front of the speaker, as another option.

Ideally, start the event with a strong speaker who will set the tone of the event. This person should stay within the

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time limit, concisely but meaningfully share their experience and, perhaps most importantly, is willing to share a deeply personal story.

Consider partnering with an organization that can provide social workers and/or therapists to be on site for the duration of the event, so that any veteran or attendee who feels the need to speak with someone will have an appropriate outlet.

Consider a check-in process that identifies scheduled speakers (so you know who is present), potential speakers, and attendance by members of the community (Appendix, Item 7).

RECORDING

These events provide a unique opportunity to record oral histories of our nation's wars. One day there may be a national archive that gathers and stores the testimony of our nation's veterans. So long as the speakers are comfortable with being recorded, consider using a tape or video recorder to capture your Vets Town Hall. Please share these recordings with the Vets Town Hall initiative, so that we can compile all of the testimonies.

PROMOTION

Promote the event well in advance using the press, social media platforms and your office's preferred method used to contact constituents (or other communities you represent), specifically veterans. Consider creating a Facebook event page or an Eventbrite page, posting about the event on official pages, sending out constituent invitation emails, etc.

- Social Media Content and Outreach, (Appendix, item 8):
- Social media graphics, **page 13**
- Social media posts (General, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), **page 14**
- Eventbrite page, **page 14**
- Invitation e-mail, **page 15**

Consider creating a Facebook event page or an Eventbrite page.

EVENT AGENDA

Below you will find an agenda that lays out the order of events, and the corresponding appendix item number.

1. Guests/Speakers arrive and sign in (Appendix, Item 7)
2. Opening Remarks (Appendix, Item 1)
3. Ground Rules (Appendix, Item 2)
4. Introduce Speakers (Appendix, Item 5)
5. Keep speakers on time with time cards (Appendix, Item 6)
6. Open the Floor (Appendix, Item 5)
7. Keep speakers on time with time cards (Appendix, Item 6)
8. Personal Remarks from Host
9. Closing Remarks (Appendix, Item 4)

APPENDICES

ITEM 1: OPENING REMARKS

In the tradition of warrior storytelling today, veterans will describe the pride, grief, rage, or quiet appreciation of life that war bestowed upon them. Each veteran will be given up to 10 minutes to speak about what his or her service means to them. This event is solemn and non-political. There will be no question-and-answer period. There will be no debate on the merits or justifications of war. There will be no recriminations or accusations. This is simply a chance for veterans to tell their community what it felt like to go to war.

[The Host can and should add his or her own personal remarks to the Opening Remarks.]

ITEM 2: GROUND RULES

My name is [NAME], and I will be acting as a MC for today's veteran town hall.

First, to our friends in the press, thank you for attending. We'd greatly appreciate your respecting the intent of this event by remembering that all veterans' comments are deeply personal. While this is an open press event, I would ask that you please respect the privacy of these veterans by asking either a member of our staff or the veterans themselves if they want to be on the record.

Today, there are many vets who would like to speak, and many non-veterans in attendance. In order for the town hall to be successful, my role is to ensure that the event honors the following agreements and expectations. A number of veterans have already indicated to us that they'd like to speak. I'll introduce each by name, branch, occupation, and years of service. Once all the predetermined veterans have gone, I'll open up the floor for other veteran attendees to speak. Each veteran will have 10 minutes to speak about what their service means to them; while you do not need to use the full 10 minutes, I will ask that you do not go over ten minutes. This is an opportunity for veterans to tell their stories with honesty, and the stories may express pride, grief, anger, or any combination of feelings.

Non-veterans also have an important role. As witnesses, non-veterans will be listeners. Actively listening without judgment or interruption is one of the most powerful and supportive roles a community can offer to returned warriors. Throughout the event, you may hear something you agree or disagree with. You may have a question. Or you may want to say encouraging words with the intention to help. However, we ask that you please refrain from responding to any speaker at any time.

Having laid out these ground rules, I'd like to introduce our first veteran speaker here at [VENUE].

ITEM 3: PRESS ADVISORY

FOR PLANNING PURPOSES

[DATE]

CONTACT

[NAME], [EMAIL], [PHONE]

[NAME] to Hold Special Veterans Day Town Hall

[CITY, STATE] -- On [DATE], [NAME] will hold a special veterans day town hall event for veterans and members of the community. The event, inspired by author Sebastian Junger, is a community forum aiming to establish a greater understanding between local veterans and the friends and neighbors they fought for.

In the tradition of warrior storytelling, veterans are invited to describe the pride, grief, rage, or quiet appreciation of life that the war bestowed upon them. Veterans are invited to share what their service means to them through a story, summary of service, message, letter home, excerpt from a war journal, or even the story behind a photograph. Non-veterans are invited to attend, to listen, and to learn.

The Town Hall will be held from [TIME]-[TIME] at [NAME OF VENUE], [ADDRESS]. If you would like to attend, please RSVP by on our [LINK TO RSVP/EVENTBRITE PAGE] If you are a veteran and would like to speak, you can mark that preference when you register.

WHO

[NAME OF HOST]

[NAME(S) OF ANY NOTABLE CONFIRMED SPEAKERS]

[COMMUNITY NAME] veterans

WHAT

Veterans Day Town Hall

WHEN

[DATE AND TIME]

WHERE

[LOCATION]

###

ITEM 4: CLOSING REMARKS

[If there are no more speakers prior to [scheduled end time], that will mark the end. Otherwise, if a speaker crosses [scheduled end time], let him or her finish, and then close.]

Today, veterans of all wars had a chance to address their community directly and without intermediaries. As a guest or speaker, you took part in a community ceremony that returns the experience of war to our entire community, rather than just leaving it to the people who fought. Not only is this vets town hall tremendously beneficial to veterans, but it may help bring communities and even the entire country together as well.

[Thank the veterans—both speakers and those who merely attended—thank the non-veterans for coming. The Host can and should add their own personal remarks to the provided closing remarks. End by reminding folks to feel free to stay and chat, but we only have the space until [TIME].]

ITEM 5: INTRODUCING SPEAKERS

"[First name] [Last name] would like to speak to the community. [First name] is a [branch] veteran, who served as a [occupation] between [start year] and [end year], during [era]."

*The media column indicates which of the scheduled speakers are willing to speak to the media. The host can share the full list with the media, specifically noting who is comfortable with press.

NAME	BRANCH	OCCUPATION	YEARS	ERA	MEDIA Y/N

OTHER INSTRUCTIONS

- Kindly help transition to the next speaker when 10 minutes are up
- If audience members interject, kindly remind them of the ground rules and expectations
- Position a staff member near the front of the podium to keep speakers on time by showing time cards.
- Arrange staff throughout the room to help attendees who need assistance.

OPENING THE FLOOR

Once you've gone through the list of speakers, thank them for telling their stories and open it up to other veterans in the audience who would like to speak. Direct them to the podium. Remind them that each veteran has a maximum of 10 minutes to speak and that we will need to begin wrapping up the town hall at [scheduled end time].

5 MINUTES
Remaining

1 MINUTE
Remaining

Time's Up!

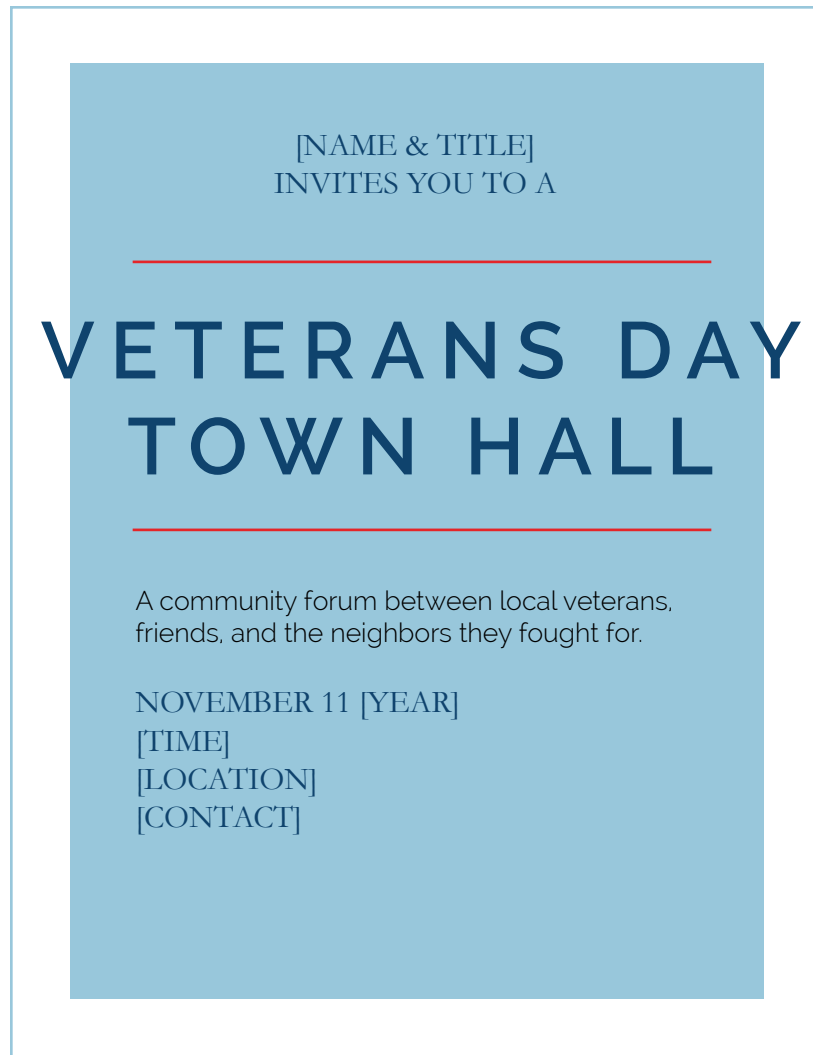
ITEM 7: CHECK IN PROCESS

Use this to capture the contact information for all those that attend your event and to identify veterans who are scheduled to speak, or may wish to speak, at your event.

NAME	ADDRESS	EMAIL	VETERAN	SPEAKING TODAY

ITEM 8: SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT & OUTREACH

A. Sample Social Media Graphic



B. Sample Social Media Posts

GENERAL

"This Veterans Day, I'm hosting a community forum aiming to establish greater understanding between veterans and the communities they served. Veterans are invited to describe the pride, grief, or quiet appreciation of life that the war bestowed upon them. Non-veterans are invited to listen and to learn. I hope you can make it. RSVP:[EVENTBRITE or FACEBOOK LINK]"

TWITTER

This #Veterans Day, listen to vet voices in [LOCATION]. I'll be there, and hope to see you too! #VetTownHall | [EVENTBRITE or FACEBOOK LINK]

The #VetTownHall we're hosting was inspired by @sebastianjunger: <http://vnty.fr/1Jtyg-ZT> Local vets & non-vets RSVP: [EVENTBRITE or FACEBOOK LINK]

#Veterans Day should be a time to learn from our vets about war & service. Come to our #VetTownHall on 11/11, [TIME] | [EVENTBRITE or FACEBOOK LINK]

What are you doing on #Veterans Day? If you're in [LOCATION], support vets by listening at our #VetTownHall event. | [EVENTBRITE or FACEBOOK LINK]

Are you a #veteran? Tell your story at our #VetsTownHall in [LOCATION]. #VeteransMatter | [EVENTBRITE or FACEBOOK LINK]

FACEBOOK

What are you doing on Veterans Day? We're hosting a #VetTownHall in [LOCATION] on 11/11 at [TIME], for local vets to tell their stories and the local community to honor through listening. Check out the event. I'll be there, and hope to see you too!

[EVENTBRITE or FACEBOOK LINK]

Are you a local veteran? Tell your story at our #VetsTownHall in [LOCATION].

[EVENTBRITE or FACEBOOK LINK]

When I read this article by Sebastian Junger, I knew we had to organize a #VetTownHall in [LOCATION]. Local vets & non-vets can RSVP at [EVENTBRITE or FACEBOOK LINK]

[Link to Vanity Fair article] <http://vnty.fr/1JtygZT>

INSTAGRAM

(Include graphic shown above) This Veterans Day, join me in [LOCATION] to listen to vet voices | [EVENTBRITE or FACEBOOK LINK]

SAMPLE EVENTBRITE PAGE

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/veteran-town-hall-tickets-18906850900>

C. Sample Invitation Email

Dear _____,

On behalf of [HOST], we invite you to attend a Veterans Town Hall at [TIME] on Veterans Day (November 11) at [LOCATION].

This unique event, inspired by Sebastian Junger, is a community forum aiming to establish a greater understanding between local veterans and the friends and neighbors they fought for. In the tradition of warrior storytelling, veterans are invited to describe the pride, grief, rage, or quiet appreciation of life that the war bestowed upon them. Each veteran is given up to 10 minutes to speak about what their service means to them through a story, summary of service, message, letter home, excerpt from a war journal, or even the story behind a photograph. The point is that it be emotionally honest. The role of non-veterans will be to attend, to listen, and to learn.

We would be honored if you would accept our invitation to join us for this event. Please RSVP to attend through [Facebook or Eventbrite Link]. If you are a veteran and would like to speak, please email [Contact information]. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[HOST or TEAM name]